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SUBJECT: GUATEMALAN ELECTIONS: POLLS OPEN WITH LONG LINES

¶1. The polls opened on time, and reports from around the country indicate that voter participation is larger than in previous elections. Lines are long, and moved slowly at the beginning, frustrating many voters, but reports from many precincts indicate that by the second hour of voting, lines were moving normally. Changes to the voter registration list ("padron electoral") caused some confusion at the opening of the polls, but they do not appear to have disenfranchised voters. Complaints that the ink used to mark voters' fingers was not working have surfaced in a number of precincts, and Supreme Electoral Tribunal (TSE) President Bolanos went on TV to explain how to apply the ink so it wouldn't come off. There have been reports of electrical outages in a small number of locations, but there are no indications that these are related to the elections.

¶2. The country is by and large calm. As of 1000 hrs. local time, there were no reports of nationally organized electoral violence, though there were some isolated incidents. Police sources tell us that in Chajul (a small town in Quiche Department), the voting center opened late and that the crowd attempted to rush in. In the crush, two intending voters were killed and five were injured. Additional police units were sent to Chajul to keep order. This report has not been carried by the media. On the night of November 8, candidate for Congress for the center-left UNE Rolando Morales Chavez was shot in an apparent hold-up attempt. Morales is in stable condition, and there are no indications that the assault against him was politically motivated. There are also reports that former civil patrol members (ex-PACs) are blocking the road leading into a small hamlet in Baja Verapaz Department. Other ex-PAC groups around the country, however, have suspended their protests to allow voting.

¶3. The Ambassador visited a polling site in Zone 13 of the capital early on the morning and then traveled to the Kakchiquel indigenous province of Chimaltenango, where he observed voting in the provincial capital and the rural communities of Santo Domingo Xenacoj and Sumpango. Voter participation in the precincts of Cimaltenango Department is high and the mood is festive.

¶4. U.S. Embassy observers spread out around the country report that all is calm, and that voters have turned out in large numbers in every location.

HAMILTON